

YOUCARING

When Hurricane Harvey targeted the Texas Gulf Coast, YouCaring experienced a \$37 million spike in donations – the largest amount ever raised on a crowdfunding platform.

BUSINESS

YouCaring is a free crowdfunding platform that empowers people to help others overcome hardships and enjoy happier, healthier lives.

CHALLENGES

YouCaring needed a robust, managed platform that could handle a massive load of concurrent users, with up to 20,000 donations per minute.

SOLUTIONS

Managed Hosting, Managed Cloud, Scalability, Website Hosting, Hybrid Cloud, Professional Services

PRODUCTS

Dedicated Servers, OpenStack® Public Cloud

OUTCOME

The Rackspace Database Services team was there to help make sure YouCaring's platform could withstand the crushing traffic to its site.



Compassionate crowdfunding

In 2011, Brock Ketcher, Naomi Ketcher and Luke Miner returned home to Redding, California, after serving two years as overseas missionaries. Inspired by their service experience, the trio wanted to continue helping others.

They set their sights on helping fellow students fundraise for tuition and other costs. To do this, they set up a free crowdfunding platform, YouCaring. Within months, YouCaring had grown to include crowdfunding campaigns for medical needs and other charitable causes.

YouCaring is now the leader in free online fundraising, having raised more than \$900 million in support of individuals, families, communities and nonprofits looking to save lives, remember loved ones, recover from disasters, fund humanitarian efforts and more.

Rather than charge a platform fee, YouCaring allows all the money users donate (less credit card fees) to go to their favorite causes. If they choose, donors can voluntarily elect to pay a percentage on top of their total donation to help fund YouCaring.

"We feel that people in need of money should be able to keep as much of it as possible," said Jesse Boland, Director of Online Marketing at YouCaring.

This compassionate crowdfunding approach placed YouCaring in the right place at the right time, when disaster struck the Texas Gulf Coast.

Raising money for Harvey victims

In August 2017, as Hurricane Harvey was preparing to unleash its worst over Houston and the surrounding communities, J.J. Watt, star defensive end of the Houston Texans, wanted to help. He decided to start a fundraiser, with a starting goal of \$200,000.

He went online in search of a free crowdfunding platform, knowing that all the money raised would need to go directly to those in need, not to overhead fees. He found and chose YouCaring.

Watt started the fundraiser on Sunday night. By Monday night, he had raised over \$1 million. And a few days later, the amount had reached over \$5 million.

"We thought it would stop there," Boland explained, "but it grew to over \$20 million, and then ultimately hit \$37 million on our platform. The largest crowdfunding campaign of all time."

But when you're accepting more than 20,000 donations per minute, you need a robust platform that can handle a massive load of concurrent users. And that's one reason the YouCaring team was glad it had already turned to Rackspace for their managed hosting needs.

Database services keep the platform available

When donations started pouring in on a Sunday, most of the YouCaring staff was out of the office. Director of Engineering Jeremy Jackson checked in with his Rackspace team and confirmed everything was up and running. But as Watt's fundraiser gained momentum, passing the million-dollar mark, performance issues began to crop up with YouCaring's database performance. Jackson called on the Rackspace database experts to help with the problem.

YouCaring had only one operations manager, and he wasn't a database administrator, Jackson explained. So, it was critical that they were able to lean on the expertise of the Rackspace Professional Services team to get the exact expertise they needed.

The primary support came from Database Team Lead Jim Steiner. He got on the phone with Jackson to help assist the YouCaring team when the total donations were about \$1.8 million. He tuned the database and the servers, adding some indexes to help the database perform better.

Just two hours later, Watt's fundraiser had doubled, reaching \$3.6 million. Steiner also pointed out a place in the YouCaring code that could be rewritten to optimize the server as well. After those changes were made, the configuration hummed along, with server utilization never rising above about 15 percent.

"The default response from a hosting vendor would have been, 'Hey, let's add more servers... buy this and it will fix your problem,'" Jackson said. "But ultimately, what is great about Rackspace is that they really looked at the problem, assessed how it could be addressed with the capabilities we had at hand, and then gave us a solution."

In a show of Rackspace's famous Fanatical Support®, Database Architect Joe Hellsten, based out of Houston, found himself helping YouCaring while watching the waters rise outside his home.

"It was amazing that while Joe was in the middle of this natural disaster that he could still support YouCaring," Steiner said. "But that's just our passion for supporting our customers."

Other athletes – and everyday guys – helping out

Since Watt's efforts, other superstars have turned to crowdfunding and the YouCaring platform. NBA star Carmelo Anthony and singer Ricky Martin raised more than \$4 million combined to help those in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria. San Antonio legend, and the greatest power forward to ever play basketball, Tim Duncan helped raise over \$2.5 million in relief for his homeland, the Virgin Islands.

"J.J. Watt set a really amazing precedent for other athletes to follow," Boland said. "We have a customer service team focused on working with people, whether you're an influencer or just an everyday guy down the street helping someone in need."

Major moment to help our neighbors

Watt's crowdfunding campaign was a huge moment for both the YouCaring and Rackspace teams. For Steiner, it was a clear manifestation of how his efforts helped fellow Texans.

"I've been at Rackspace for 11 years, and that has to be one of the more satisfying things I've done," Steiner said. "I literally left the YouCaring website on my screen for a week to watch the donations roll in. I have friends who were in Houston and, seeing what they're having to go through, it felt fantastic that I could help make a difference."



The folks at YouCaring felt the same way. The overwhelming response proved how important their platform was.

“What was unique about this [crowdfunding effort] with J.J. Watt was that you had a powerful influencer willing to use his prowess and his social network for good. And that was something we hadn’t seen at this scale before,” Jackson said. “[It] made me want to do everything I could as an engineer – stay up as late as I needed to, to make sure that we delivered for him, and make sure that the site ultimately stayed up and that the people of Houston got the money that they needed to rebuild their lives.”

True partnership

Going forward, the YouCaring team is glad to be working with Rackspace. They know that their dedicated team of experts is always just a call away, 24x7x365.

“Rackspace brings the subject matter expertise in areas that you may not have. It means you always have someone to call, to fill those roles and provide another set of eyes,” Jackson explained.

“And they’re always in tune with our needs,” he continued. “If there’s an issue, they know how to resolve it, and we know who to talk with. I think that comes with personalization and the Rackspace Fanatical Support response.”

With Rackspace managing their infrastructure and helping them maintain uptime, YouCaring can focus on their core mission.

Boland explained, “Rackspace has been a great partner for YouCaring. They have allowed us to maintain our uptime and allowed millions of people to successfully donate to alleviate suffering and hardship – for people in the United States recently, but also around the world.”

ABOUT RACKSPACE

Rackspace, the #1 managed cloud company, helps businesses tap the power of cloud computing without the complexity and cost of managing it on their own. Rackspace engineers deliver specialized expertise, easy-to-use tools, and Fanatical Support® for leading technologies developed by AWS, Google, Microsoft, OpenStack, VMware and others. The company serves customers in 150 countries, including more than half of the FORTUNE 100. Rackspace is a leader in the 2017 Gartner Magic Quadrant for Public Cloud Infrastructure Managed Service Providers, Worldwide, and has been honored by Fortune, Forbes and others as one of the best companies to work for.

Learn more at www.rackspace.com or call us at **1-800-961-2888**.

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